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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Release Monday, February 8, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WHAT'S IN A FOOD NAME?" From the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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Last week's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration told us how much orange juice there should be in orangeade, and how much lime juice in a lime rickey.

Definitions for these fruit-juice beverages, proposed by the Food Standards Committee of the United States Department of Agriculture and accepted by the Secretary of Agriculture, are used by the Food and Drug Administration in enforcing the Pure Food Law.

Now today our official correspondent continues the story of food definitions and standards. Quoting directly:

"Reading labels helps consumers to buy what they want. But to read labels intelligently, you should know how various foods are defined. (Write to the Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D. C., if you want a copy of SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS, Food and Drug Number Two, a publication which contains the definitions and standards for food products).

"Food and Drug officials are constantly checking products and their labels, to protect consumers from untruthful and misleading statements. For example, suppose you ask your grocer for a bottle of Mayonnaise, and he hands you a product labeled Salad Dressing. Do you know the difference, according to Government definition?

"Well, Mayonnaise must contain 'not less than fifty percent of edible vegetable oil,' and enough egg yolk to make an emulsion with the vinegar or lemon juice. There is no standard for Salad Dressing, which on the other hand, may contain only a small amount of egg yolk, or none at all. Furthermore, Salad Dressing may contain, among other products, starch and a considerable amount of water, with substantially less than 50 percent oil.

"Only one food definition, that for butter, has the force of law. The others are regulatory announcements of the Department of Agriculture. Officials who enforce the Pure Food Law cannot plead the definition of a food product as the law of the land, the violation of which should be punished with a penalty. Congress has not established legal standards for foods, excepting butter.

"Butter is the only food defined by law. Congress by the act of March 4, 1923, made butter legally a food product which is 'made exclusively from milk or cream, or both, with or without common salt, and with or without additional coloring matter, and contains not less than eighty percent by weight of milk fat.'

"To enforce this legal definition of butter, officials of the Food and Drug Administration need only prove that the butter in question fails to measure up to the minimum requirements of the legal standard. So much for butter, the only food defined by law.

"The definitions for other foods -- for mayonnaise, orangeade, lime rickey and scores of other food products," quoting our correspondent, "Attempt to reduce to plain and specific terms the existing good trade practices, and consumer understanding with respect to foods. Administration of the Pure Food Law is guided by these definitions. Since this is true, it is doubly important that the Food Standards Committee make definitions which accurately reflect both consumers' opinion of the product and good commercial practice. Otherwise the definition would not stand up in court as the commonly accepted standard.

"For instance," still quoting, "a few years ago a food product sold as strawberry jam was found deficient in fruit according to the Federal definition. The Food and Drug Administration seized the product and the manufacturer took the case into court. Government attorneys first established the validity of the definition, which reads 'not less than forty-five pounds of fruit to each fifty-five pounds of sugar' should be used in the manufacture of fruit jams or preserves.

"Housewives told the jury how they made preserves or jam by cooking equal parts of fruit and sugar. Manufacturers described the traditional practice. In the end, the Government won its case. The product on trial contained half the amount of fruit described in the definition, with added pectin and a considerable amount of excess water. The court accepted the definition, and held that the Pure Food Act had been violated.

"In eighteen States, food definitions have the effect and force of law. State food laws as a rule follow the same general pattern as the Federal Pure Food Act of 1906."

That's all of today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, a report entitled, "What's In a Food Name?" And remember, homemakers, if you want to become more intelligent label-readers, you can increase your knowledge about food products by reading the definitions proposed by the Food Standards Committee of the United States Department of Agriculture.

These definitions are yours for the asking. Write to the Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D. C., and ask for SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS, Food and Drug Number Two.

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